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Mr. Bohlen
Mr. Nitze

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August 1, 1952

U - Mr. Bruce:

Thought you would be interested to know that a rather elaborate study on the British position in the Middle East is under way based upon the attached terms of reference.

H. A. Byroade

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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OFFICE OF DIRECTOR

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cc: Mr. Bohlen
Mr. Nitze
EUR - Mr. Perkins

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THE BRITISH POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Problem:

To analyze the British position in the Middle East and determine what it is worth to the United States. (For this purpose, the Middle East is assumed to consist of Greece, Turkey, Iran, Libya, Egypt, the Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula).

Background and Discussion:

Much of our past and present policy in the Middle East is based on the assumption that Britain can and should be primarily responsible for maintaining basic Western interests in the area. This is explicitly stated in strategic plans for the defense of the Middle East. It is likewise explicit in policies dealing specifically with Libya, Egypt, the Sudan, Iraq, and the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf. Even in fields of action or geographical territories where we do not recognize a predominant British interest and responsibility (as in Greece and Turkey), our policy always implicitly or explicitly provides for support of whatever British position exists and for utilization of British influence as an important adjunct to our own.

This reliance upon Britain has its origin in the historic fact that in modern times she has been the predominant western power in the area. Many of the territories concerned have been under direct British rule and all of them, at one time or another, have been subject to powerful British influence. The United States has wanted to see this historic position maintained because:

1. It was not considered to conflict with any fundamental American interest but, on the contrary, to be a safeguard for the interests of all the western community.

2. It was assumed, at least by many, that British experience and prestige in the area would enable Britain to protect western interests more easily and more effectively than could be done by any other power.

3. British thinking has attached greater importance to the area than we have been inclined to give it in the past; consequently, Britain has been more ready to assume responsibility than we have been.

4. Britain has great economic, military, political and moral interests in the region and would have deeply resented any attempt to reduce her position. Since Britain is our most important friend and ally, we would not wish to create friction by attempting to displace her in the Middle East against her will, nor would we wish to weaken Britain's general world position.

5. Our

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5. Our own commitments in other parts of the world are so vast that we have been only too glad to let Britain keep the lead, insofar as she has been able to do so, in the Middle East.

However, it has became obvious that Britain's strength in the region is no longer what it was a few years ago. She has had to give up control of Palestine, Cyrenaica, and Tripolitania. She has been forced out of the oil fields of Iran. She has had to abandon aid to Greece and Turkey. She is barely holding on to her last remaining military bases in Egypt and will in any case be forced out of them by 1956 unless there is an unexpected turn for the better. Even in Jordan and Iraq her influence is no longer fully effective. Anti-British feeling seems to be growing throughout the area. This has repercussions in the United Nations, where small states attack Britain for her "imperialist" attitude. The United States is severely criticized for its alleged support of British imperialism in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Britain's domestic economy remains weak and it is quite likely that she will again be forced to reduce her commitments abroad for financial reasons, unless she receives additional assistance. Even if such assistance were available, political conditions might force her to withdraw from certain positions (as in Egypt).

Conclusions:

1. It is no longer safe to assume, automatically, that Britain can and should be considered the principal protector of western interests in the Middle East.

2. It is conceivable that the interests of the United States and the western community as a whole would be better served if Britain were to assume a secondary position.

3. We may be faced at any moment with a British request for large amounts of additional aid to enable her to fulfill her responsibilities in the Middle East. Alternatively, we may be faced with a British withdrawal from one or more positions, aid or no aid. In the former case, we would have to decide whether to provide the requested assistance, and in the latter whether to attempt ourselves to fill the gap left by the British withdrawal.

4. To determine our attitude when and if the time comes, we should re-assess the British position in the Middle East.

RECOMMENDATION:

An urgent study should be made of the British position in the Middle East, in accordance with the following outline:

A. Of what

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A. Of what does the British position consist?

1. Militarily—

   a. Bases and base rights in the area?

   b. Quantities and types of ground, air and naval forces normally maintained in the area, and where?

   c. Special relationships with indigenous military establishments, (arrangements for wartime cooperation, transit rights, military training missions, etc.)?

   d. Potential military contribution of the United Kingdom and the Dominions to the defense of the area in time of war.

2. Economically—

   a. British investments in the area, by countries (oil fields, oil refineries, public utilities, banks, private industry, etc.)?

   b. Movement of British investments into and out of the area currently and in the recent past?

   c. British trade with the area, by countries, and its relative importance to overall British trade?

   Sources of essential foodstuffs and industrial materials (oil, cotton, etc.)?

3. Politically—

   a. Special treaty relationships?

   b. Presence of British political advisers and administrators?

   c. Subsidies to local governments?

   d. Ex[illegible]t of British influence on local governments?

   e. To what extent does British political activity produce adverse (negative) reactions in the area?

4. Morally—

   a. British educational and cultural institutions?

   b. Extent of British cultural influence on local peoples?

   c. Friendly or unfriendly attitudes of local peoples toward Britain?

B. Whom

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B. Whom does this position benefit, and who suffers from it?

1. Britain--

a. Does she make a net profit from her investments, public and private, and her trade with the area?

b. Does this profit, if any, offset the cost of maintaining troops, bases, subsidies to local forces, and the like?

c. If not, are the strategic advantages gained sufficient to justify the net financial loss, from the British point of view?

d. Are the economic and strategic advantages great enough to offset the political antagonisms generated by the maintenance of the British position in countries hostile to it?

e. What elements of the British position are especially irksome to the Near Eastern states?

f. To what extent would British economic interests be affected by a diminution of the British military and political position in the Near East?

g. In the case of countries contributing to the British "dollar pool", does Britain have a net favorable or unfavorable dollar balance?

2. The Middle Eastern countries—

a. Economically and financially, do they gain or lose?

b. To what extent are they dependent on Britain for the maintenance of their armed forces?

c. To what extent are they dependent on British forces for their defense, and how effective would this defense be in time of major war?

d. Do they welcome or resent British political and cultural influence? Is it helpful in checking communist influence? Is it helpful in promoting economic and social development?

3. The United States—

a. Does British activity in the Middle East make our own relations with the area easier or more difficult? In what ways?

b. How much of the British military establishment in the area is essential to Western defense and how much merely serves particular British interests? If British forces were curtailed, would it be strategically necessary for other forces to fill the gap? Would American investments (especially oil) and trade be endangered by a weakening of the British position?

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